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New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station



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WATER PAGES eNEWSLETTER

A Week in Massachusetts – Sharing Knowledge from the Water Resources Program



Springfield, MA, Northeast Regional Urban Extension Conference, June 2023

It all started when I was fortunate enough to attend the last two NEIWPCCC Conferences (May 2022 and April 2023). NEIWPCCC stands for the New England Water Pollution Control Commission. Last year it was in Woodstock, Vermont, and I presented on our Green Infrastructure Champion Training Program. This year in Saratoga Springs, New York I gave two presentations: 1) *Addressing Climate Change and Flooding Issues in Watershed Restoration and Protection Plans in Underserved Communities* and 2) *The Role of Municipal Action Teams to Advocate for Green Infrastructure in Environmental Justice Communities*. What was cool in Saratoga Springs was my son, Cody, gave a presentation at the same conference. For those of you who do not know, Cody is a Professional Engineer in Maine, working for the Maine Department of Environmental Protection as a stormwater engineer. He is brilliant ... definitely takes after his mother.

But this is not about NEIWPCCC but more about the impact from attending these conferences. Jessica Brown, a former engineer with the Water Resources Program, coined a phrase “it is all about R&D.” Now most people think R&D stands for Research and Development, but in Extension it stands for Ripoff and Duplication. As

Extension professionals, our goal is always to share our knowledge with our colleagues locally and nationally in the hope that they will like our programs and adopt them for their communities. Apparently, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection loved the Green Infrastructure Champions Training Program and want to offer it in Massachusetts next year. Outstanding! The folks from Region 1 Environmental Protection Agency (the New England Region) loved my talk on Municipal Action Teams and invited me to be the keynote speaker at the Southeast New England Program Forum in Fall River, MA on June 14, 2023. After starting in Fall River, I travelled over to Springfield MA to speak at the Northeast Regional Urban Extension Conference where I shared my knowledge with Extension professional throughout the Northeast. The Urban Extension Conference was about promoting collaboration among Extension professionals across state lines. My hope is that the next NE Regional Urban Extension Conference will be in New Jersey and all of you can attend to learn about the great programming Extension is doing throughout the Northeast. Maybe you will be able to do a little R&D while you are there.

It was an amazing week. I learned a lot and people are very excited about what is going on in New Jersey.

~ Christopher C. Obropta, Ph.D., P.E., Extension Specialist in Water Resources

Waterspirit: 25th Anniversary – Joys of the Sea

Many of us are dedicated to preserving and protecting our environment. We advocate for green infrastructure; we fight to stop developers from cutting down trees and destroying wetlands; we educate people about climate change and demand our politicians pursue renewable energy sources instead of fossil fuels; and we seek out organic food that is grown locally. Many of us have a strong passion for Mother Earth and would do almost anything to protect her and help her heal.

The mission of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program is to *identify and address water resources issues by engaging and empowering communities to employ practical science-based solutions to help create a more equitable and sustainable New Jersey*. Yes, it's a job for me and my staff, but it is so much more. My love for helping communities with their water problems goes beyond just my job, it has been and always will be spiritual to me. I live and breathe my values around improving our water resources. I strive to educate people, to change their behavior, and to make their waterways healthy and reduce flooding in their neighborhoods.

I first encountered Waterspirit over ten years ago when I was invited to speak at one of their events. At that time, I did not know much about Waterspirit, but I thought a group that "at its heart is a spirituality that recognizes the sacredness of water and all of nature" seemed like a group I would probably want to get to know. I attended Waterspirit's 25th Birthday Celebration this past June 10th and was so happy I went. This is a wonderful organization that delivers programming that will deepen your appreciation of water, increase your understanding of water issues, and empower you to participate in the protection and preservation of water. They also advocate on local, national, and international water issues. My hope is to enhance the Water Resources Program partnership with Waterspirit and work together to deliver meaningful programming. I hope all of you will spend a few minutes and check out

this wonderful organization at <https://www.waterspirit.org/>



~ Christopher C. Obropta, Ph.D., P.E., Extension Specialist in Water Resources

Double the Rain Gardens, Double the Impact at Hackettstown Middle School



Photo credit: Chris Perez, Water Resources Program

Hackettstown Middle School (HMS) is the latest school in New Jersey to install rain gardens to manage stormwater runoff and create wildlife habitat in the Upper Delaware River watershed and New Jersey Highlands Planning Area. Two rain gardens, 360 and 325 square feet, were installed at the front entrance of HMS. These rain gardens manage runoff from two rooftop drainage areas of 1,440 and 1,405 square feet, respectively, and each have the potential to manage 25,070 gallons of

runoff annually.

The Water Resources Program provided the design, and local excavator, Robert Burd and the Hackettstown School District facilities staff constructed the rain gardens. Six classes of HMS students and teachers planted over 200 native perennials and shrubs, beautifying the entrance and creating a new habitat for pollinator species.

The two HMS projects were funded through a combined effort of the Hackettstown School District and the Water Resources Program. Funding was provided from Hackettstown Middle School through a New Jersey Department of Education Climate Awareness Education grant and from the Water Resources Program through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant.



Photo credit: Chris Perez, Water Resources Program

Growing Green Infrastructure Knowledge One Green Infrastructure Champion at a Time

The 2023 Green Infrastructure Champion Training Program was a huge success! A total of 305 participants completed five or more sessions to become certified Green Infrastructure Champions and leaders who can advocate for green infrastructure in their communities. Participants represented 20 different counties in New Jersey, and 28 participants were from outside of New Jersey!

Here are the 2023 numbers:

- 10 training sessions (via Zoom) with an average attendance = 280
- # of people who attended at least one session = 302
- # of people who attended at least five sessions a.k.a. Green Infrastructure Champions = 305
- # government/municipal organizations = 121
- # NGOs/Partnerships/Nonprofit Organizations/Academic = 91
- # of private organizations = 77

Following the final class on May 19, 2023, the Water Resources Program held the 1st Green Infrastructure Champion's mini- conference at the Rutgers EcoComplex in Bordentown, Burlington County, New Jersey. Fifty-seven Green Infrastructure Champions attended to share their experiences, struggles, and needs as Green Infrastructure Champions and to hear from an excellent panel of keynote speakers namely Kim Gaddy, Clean Water Action National Environmental Justice Director & South Ward Environmental Alliance Executive Director; Nicole Miller, NewarkDIG

Green Infrastructure Reformer Coordinator; and Greg Remaud, NYNJ Baykeeper CEO and Baykeeper. Green Infrastructure Champions from 2019-2023 were represented at the conference. The Water Resources Program can't wait until next year's program which will begin in January 2024, so keep an eye out for registration this fall.



1st Green Infrastructure Champions mini-conference, Rutgers EcoComplex, May 19, 2023

Photo credit: Dawn Gia, Green Infrastructure Champion

Revitalizing New Jersey's Overburdened Communities with Green Infrastructure Champions



Long Pond School rain garden, spring 2023

Photo credit: Nathaniel Sajdak, Wallkill River Watershed Management Group

Green infrastructure projects for overburdened communities (OBCs) are currently being developed by the Water Resources Program to help improve water quality during storm events. To help find ideal locations which can help the public, the Water Resources Program asked our team of Green Infrastructure Champions if they had any sites in their communities with stormwater issues.

Green Infrastructure Champion, Kristine Rogers, reached out to us to let us know that an existing garden at Long Pond School in Andover Township, Sussex County, could be retrofitted into a rain garden because of the runoff that pools in the area. We worked with Kristine and some students from Long Pond School to design a garden. The students gave recommendations for the types of plants they wanted in the garden as well as a walking path through the garden so they could inspect the plants closely. During the installation of the rain garden some students came out to help put the plants they choose into the garden. This was truly a collaborative effort between the Water Resources Program, Green Infrastructure Champion Kristine Rogers, and the students at Long Pond School!

Rain Garden Native Plant Spotlight ~ Sedges (*Carex spp.*)

Species in the *Carex* genus, including Fox Sedge, are grass-like perennials with semi-evergreen foliage and a versatile range of moisture and light requirements. Sedges are attractive and reliable rain garden plants, especially when in large groups as ground covers and/or as understory plantings. Sedges are also attractive to birds and butterflies and thrive in the spring and fall when flowering perennials and most vegetation in a perennial garden is dormant. The Water Resources Program often uses Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*), Fox Sedge (*Carex vulpinoidea*), and Tussock Sedge (*Carex stricta*) in rain garden projects.

For more information:

Wildflower.org

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=cavu2

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=cape6

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=cast8

Missouribotanicalgarden.org

<https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=f237>



Carex vulpinoidea, Fox Sedge

Photo credit: Chris Perez, RCE Water Resources Program



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Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program

water@envsci.rutgers.edu

www.water.rutgers.edu

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Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program | 14 College Farm Road, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

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